

OFFICE OF NDUKA OBAIGBENA CON

APAPA LAGOS, NIGERIA

LIES HAVE SHORT LEGS, THEY DO NOT RUN FAR. The Fake News from Bayo Onanuga and Dele Alake

We read with dismay Messrs Dele Alake and Bayo Onanuga's continued vehement personal attacks, supposedly on behalf of the APC PCC Media Communication Directorate (many APC PCC members have called us to dissociate themselves), on the Chairman/Editor-in-Chief THISDAY & ARISE News Channel, Nduka Obaigbena, and his media group.

Every day the media calls on public officials and those who seek public office to account. Since the media is a public trust, we will respond to the duo's allegations in a comprehensive manner, even if we are not bound to so do, as we do not seek public office. But we believe we owe it a duty to our audiences who may have read the lies and fake news reminiscent of the Nazi Party's chief propagandist Joseph Goebbels, or the incorrigible Iraqi Ali Hassan al-Majeed, otherwise known as Chemical Ali, who was still propagating his country's successes in the 1990 Gulf War long after the allied forces had taken over the capital, Baghdad.

WE CATEGORISE THE LIES AND FAKE NEWS INTO FOUR:

1) M.K.O. Abiola and June 12:

When the late Chief M.K.O Abiola was the flag bearer of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) for the 1993 presidential election, Obaigbena was a senatorial candidate on the platform of the National Republican Convention (NRC). And Abiola supported SDP's Candidate, the late Chris Okolie, leading to a strain in their relationship. Obaigbena was also Special Adviser to the NRC National Chairman Tom Ikimi in 1991, and later Hameed Kusamotu. Before and after the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, Abiola and Obaigbena

were friends and remained friends till the end. Abiola was broad-minded enough to understand that Obaigbena, like his other friends in NRC, were competitors for power. But that competition ended when Abacha took power and all true democrats moved against military rule. Indeed, Abiola's last public appearance was an Obaigbena event at the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) on June 8, 1994 where he took the Abacha government to the cleaners while demanding his mandate. After his speech against the Abacha junta, he went underground only to reappear in Epetedo, Lagos Island, on June 12, 1994 to declare himself president. The rest, as they say, is history.

Some weeks before the Epetedo Declaration on May 9, 1994, Abiola and Obaigbena had met on a South African flight from London to Johannesburg for Nelson Mandela's presidential inauguration. Obaigbena sat on one side of an aisle seat, while Abiola sat on the other side of that aisle seat with his wife Kudirat taking the window seat next to him. On the Abiola delegation was the late Chief Ralph Uweche, and Cameron Daodu, the Ghanaian-born London Observer journalist and writer. Abiola and Obaigbena spoke throughout the 12-hour flight on the events leading to June 12 and thereafter made peace. Abiola reminded Obaigbena that he had driven all the way from Ilorin to Lagos City Hall to attend his wedding in 1987. I then invited him to my event of June 8, 1994. As we arrived Johannesburg International Airport as guests of the Mandelas, Obaigbena was witness to his claim of being the elected Nigerian President and his delegation was driven off in official motorcade while Obaigbena made his way to the Carlton Hotel, downtown Johannesburg (the same hotel most invited guests lodged), and later bussed to Union Building in Pretoria, venue of the inauguration where he ran into Dele Olojede who was covering the event for a

New York newspaper.

Military leader at the time, Gen. Sani Abacha soon arrived; on his delegation were then foreign minister Babagana Kingibe, Naval Chief Allison Madueke, former president Shehu Shagari and ex-Head of State Yakubu Gowon. Abiola sat in studied silence and was like everybody inspired and driven by the Mandela moment in the sun. In the evening, Abiola did not attend the banquet; he left for London and then returned to Nigeria and to Owo for consultations. Shortly after, the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) was formed in Lagos.

The next morning, I attended the meeting on the sideline with Mandela associates, who said they wished Abiola had not left; they wanted our assistance in setting up a newspaper as the South African media was controlled by the white minority. Although I promised to help, that opportunity did not come until 2003 when we started THISDAY South Africa which soon became easily one of the best newspapers in the country, by every ranking. However, the establishment did not like it that a Nigerian –owned newspaper was shaping public opinion. A South African special security official once invited me to play golf and told me pointedly that they couldn't have a Nigerian newspaper Reporter at the (Union Buildings) State House. Despite the support of Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, who had become president then, the establishment insisted on South African ownership for THISDAY Newspapers.

Shortly after that request, bank credit lines were frozen in South African banks despite presenting a US\$5 million Citibank guarantee from GTBank. The banks simply refused to grant credit to the newspaper. After a few crisis meetings with South African investors and with Naaspers, and our refusal to cede editorial control in any co-ownership from the bigger South African media companies, we closed our SA operations after some \$30 million USD investment over two years.

At ARISE News Channel and THISDAY we believe the narratives around Africa and Africans and the black race can only change when we have strong global voices. We have used our “sorrow, blood and tears” (apologies Fela) to pioneer this process in South Africa, Europe and the USA. It can only get better. Aljazeera has done it for the Arab world; we too can.

Even at home, back in Nigeria, we are being misrepresented and libelled by some envious peers.



Prince Nduka Obaigbena presenting a framed first copy of THISDAY South Africa to Nelson Mandela



Presenting first copy to President Thabo Mbeki

Contrary to the wild claims of Alake and Onanuga, we did not owe any tax authorities in South Africa; we also paid all our creditors in an organised exit strategy. If they have any such evidence to the contrary, they should publish it immediately. Indeed, our debacle in South Africa is one of the factors that persuaded the patriotic President Olusegun Obasanjo administration to cancel the South African Airways takeover of Nigeria Airways, given that Nigerian businesses were being discriminated against in that country.

2) ARISE Networks Limited (ANL) UK:

Nduka Obaigbena's disqualification as a Director is still a subject of litigation in the UK Court of Appeals and we wouldn't want to make further comments on matters before the Appeals Court. It is sufficient to point out, however, that due to the foreign exchange shortage from Nigeria, ARISE Networks Ltd (ANL), one of our UK operating companies supplying personnel to the network, couldn't meet creditor payments for some months, as at when due. The judge was of the considered opinion that ANL should have shut down its business in the UK instead of trading when there was no clarity as to when the FX situation would improve in Nigeria. The Judgement made it clear that there was

no evidence of any dishonesty against Obaigbena. Since those initial teething difficulties, other ARISE entities have traded out of the shortages and ARISE News Channel is now thriving in the UK, Europe, the USA, Middle East and 54 countries of Africa. We await the judgement of the Appellate Courts on ANL as to why and if we ought to have known that the FX shortages in Nigeria would not improve to continue trading.

3) EFCC and NPAN Refund:

That the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) invited Obaigbena and Executives of other national newspapers to clarify payments made to the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN). Obaigbena as NPAN president at the time was invited, just as the executives of all newspapers involved (The Nation owned by Bola Tinubu inclusive), to clarify the payments received. He was not detained as he signed no bail bond, and indeed has never been detained by the EFCC or the Police in any criminal case, contrary to the fake news of Bayo Onanuga and Dele Alake.

What were the facts of the EFCC invitation? For about two weeks security agents carried out raids of circulation vehicles of media houses, in the guise of searching for arms, disrupting their operations, resulting in losses of millions of naira in advert and newspaper sales. The Nation newspaper (owned by Bola Ahmed Tinubu) was perhaps the most affected, a situation they interpreted as being targeted as an opposition newspaper. The NPAN called a meeting of media owners and other stakeholders and decided to challenge the Jonathan government in a class action in court. President Goodluck Jonathan, however, invited newspaper owners to a meeting, which Bayo Onanuga attended in State House Marina, Lagos and committed to pay compensation for the losses. All affected newspapers were requested to submit their claims within a given deadline; 13 newspapers sent in their applications within the deadline, with The Nation filing a N200 million claim. However, Jonathan sought media owners understanding to pay N10m each and N130m was released to the NPAN by the Office of the National Security Adviser (NSA) for that purpose. The NPAN issued N9m cheque each to the 13 newspapers that met the application deadline, the media owners having collectively decided that the association make the payment less N1m each to run NPAN affairs. The Buhari government, however, took over and requested a refund ostensibly because the payment came from the arms fund, something the media owners were in no position to know, a priori. All the media houses that had collected their payment

cheques refunded them to the NPAN which paid the refund. It is patently untrue and fake news that some media houses didn't get the payment NPAN collected on their behalf; cheques were issued for pickup at the Secretariat and some newspapers had not picked up their cheques before the Buhari government requested a refund.

Like the N130m for newspapers, the N500 million THISDAY refunded was compensation the Jonathan administration paid THISDAY for the Boko Haram bombing of the newspaper's elegant Abuja office. The Jonathan administration paid compensation for, and/or rebuilt properties bombed by Boko Haram terrorists in Abuja, The United Nations and THISDAY inclusive. Again, when the Buhari administration requested refund, it was fully made. The property remains un-rebuilt.

4) Staff Salaries and Other Matters:

We have been very consistent in paying salaries regularly and as at when due every month at ARISE News Channel. We do not owe staffers at ARISE whatsoever despite the fake news of Bayo Onanuga and Dele Alake. Of course, all Newspaper houses are facing the tough economic environment arising from increasing cost of operations and dwindling copy and advert sales and most newspapers owe salaries from time to time. It is, however, taking hypocrisy to a new level for Onanuga to be sermonizing about salary payments. Those who passed through The News stable of which he was co-founder and CEO have not forgotten how the company owed 11-month salaries between 1996 and 1997, how protesting staff were forced to forfeit 5-month salary as "contribution to the democratic struggle", and how union leaders were sacked over the same protest.

All we do is create value. We have had over 3,000 people in the employment of THISDAY/ARISE Media Group over the years and we are proud to have created value in human and resource capital. Dozens of those we have employed here have moved to become ministers, special advisers, ambassadors, commissioners, special assistants, and publishers of print and online newspapers, including several who are Tinubu's personal staff and executives in his companies. And all have continued to serve with honour. The kind of journalism we practice and the training we give, make our staffers the most sought after by all leaders around the country.

Obaigbena never sought to be NPAN president, he was invited to become President



Prince Obaigbena with President George W. Bush, Tony Blair and Condoleezza Rice



With President Bill Clinton

and yet he served for all of 10 years. Despite meeting only about N2m in the association's account on taking over, with his robust leadership, the association was able to acquire a property of its own for a secretariat and he left N10m in the balance sheet. He was also invited to be the founding president of Africa Media Leaders Forum.

Obaigbena organised seminars and conferences with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Programme of Seminars) in 1997 and 1999 in Washington, DC as Convener, the Nigeria Investment Summit, and has been keynote speaker at several national and international fora, including those of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland; Dalian, China; and Cape Town, South Africa.

Obaigbena has hosted US presidents and global leaders like Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush; Prime Ministers Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Bertie Ahern, Vicente Fox and John Howard; Chancellor Gerhard

Schroder; and other leaders like Collin Powell, Henry Kissinger, Condoleezza Rice, Kofi Annan, Jeb Bush, etc. Indeed, to invite a US president or a spouse of a US Secretary of State, you must go through White House Security vetting to show you are fit and proper.

No misinformation, fake news of Bayo Onanuga and Dele Alake will change Obaigbena's global trajectory. The journalists at THISDAY and ARISE News Channel are doing their duty by raising pertinent questions. Rather than addressing our questions, Alake and Onanuga countered with wild and misleading allegations and fake news. We did not dismiss their

allegations and have addressed them frontally. We now challenge them to respond with facts to the legitimate questions of the Nigerian people through their media. Present your Presidential candidate for Town Hall meetings, debates and interviews by the independent media that last for more than 8 minutes, and not pre-arranged Townhalls where questions are pre-set, prearranged and rehearsed.

The resort to media bullying tactics, blackmail and fake news will not work. Journalists are not your opponents in the 2023 elections. "When they go low we go high"

SIGNED
FAUZIYA MOHAMMED
 CHIEF OF STAFF,
 OFFICE OF NDUKA OBAIGBENA